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DEPT FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

USUN PASS TO SE YATES

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TAGS: OTRA PGOV PREL SO

SUBJECT: Scenesetter for Somalia President Yusuf Visit

Classified by Ambassador Ranneberger for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

REF: A. Nairobi 902 B. Nairobi 903 C. Addis Ababa 946 D. Nairobi 856

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. Changed circumstances with respect to Somalia provide an important opportunity to achieve relative stability and move forward toward a democratic transition in 2009. There is a new Prime Minister who is committed to achieving reconciliation; a divergence between violent extremists and the former Islamic Courts; an expressed desire by opposition elements to support peace and join the reconciliation process; a new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) who has earned confidence from all sides; Ethiopian fatigue and desire to reduce its presence; and, opportunities to press for a UN peacekeeping operation.

¶12. (C) Summary Continued: In this context, President of the Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed will visit the United States. He will arrive on April 14 to attend UN Security Council meetings on peacekeeping in Africa and to travel to Washington for meetings with USG officials, NGOs and representatives of the Somali diaspora. It is a unique moment to press President Yusuf on the issues and ensure that he will not undermine the Prime Minister and the reconciliation process. Leveraging our strong relationship with Yusuf, we can encourage him to support the positive momentum underway toward peace-building efforts and political transition in Somalia. End Summary.

Background

¶13. (C) President Yusuf was elected to head the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) by delegates in the 2004 Nairobi-based dialogue process that created the TFG. He is the only person who has held the office of TFG President. In late January 2007 President Yusuf announced that there would be a National Reconciliation Congress, which took place from July 15 to September 1, 2007. With strong support from the U.S., the conference laid the groundwork for a more representative government, but the political dialogue was abbreviated and power-sharing negotiations left incomplete. After consulting with us, Yusuf selected former chair of the Red Crescent Society Nur "Adde" Hassan Hussein to serve as Prime Minister in November 2007 after former Prime Minister Gedi resigned.

¶14. (C) Prime Minister Hussein initially proposed a large cabinet that met clan distribution requirements but did little to address core concerns about competency and genuine representativeness. After internal negotiations, and at the urging of the U.S. and other donors, PM Hussein nominated a lean cabinet that won unanimous parliamentary approval. At the same time, President Yusuf became gravely ill and went to London for medical treatment. Just two weeks after its appointment, the cabinet moved from Baidoa to Mogadishu. The PM and his ministers immediately embarked upon an ambitious

reconciliation process "open to all Somalis." They engaged local community business leaders, civil society representatives, women's and youth groups, elders, and religious leaders. To the surprise of many, all of these constituencies have nothing but praise for the Prime Minister and his efforts. Under the leadership of PM Hussein the TFG has gained public support and confidence. Ethiopia and the international community also strongly support the Prime Minister.

¶15. (C) Sidelined by ill-health and absent for much of January, unable to "pacify" Mogadishu a year after re-entering the city via the Ethiopian military, possibly envious of the PM's successes while temperamentally incapable of meaningful reconciliatory gestures, the President has emerged as perhaps the major impediment to the Prime Minister's reconciliation efforts. As soon as he returned to Mogadishu from London, Yusuf began to undermine the PM's reconciliation roadmap, rallying his loyalists within the administration and the parliament to challenge PM Hussein, especially on the issue of security. Yusuf contends that Hussein is "soft" on security and believes that dialogue should begin only after the TFG rids the population of terrorist elements. Yusuf tends to label as "terrorists" many whom others might regard as opposition.

¶16. (C) Yusuf also has challenged the PM-led initiative to stand up a small private force to maintain security in the Bakara Market area as a pilot for community-level policing. Yusuf has been actively working to influence the parliament to pass a no-confidence vote against PM Hussein. The Prime Minister told us that he is under direct threat by "increasingly aggressive attacks" by Yusuf. With President Yusuf in the United States, he will be unable to influence directly day-to-day events in Somalia during a critical moment where reconciliation is gaining momentum.

Themes for the Visit

¶17. (C) Prime Minister Hussein has demonstrated unwavering commitment to a reconciliation process and has invited "all Somalis" to engage in dialogue. The Prime Minister has enjoyed some success, but continued progress can be better achieved if Yusuf supports (or at least does not actively undermine) the process. It is not necessary to qualify who participates in dialogue, as extremist elements will self-select out of the process. By publicly voicing his support for the reconciliation process, and refraining from actions that pose obstacles, Yusuf can contribute toward maintaining the positive momentum he helped launch with the 2007 National Reconciliation Conference.

¶18. (C) The Asmara-based Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) represents members of the former Islamic Courts, parliamentarians, and other opposition elements. We met recently with the ARS and its leaders insist that the organization is committed to non-violence, has diverged from the Shabaab, and supports a peaceful dialogue with the TFG (Ref A). The onus is now on the ARS to demonstrate its commitment to forging a democratic transition in Somalia. Yusuf has opposed engagement with the ARS, but should be encouraged not to block progress on dialogue with this external opposition group.

¶19. (C) The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah is well respected by President Yusuf, the Prime Minister, and opposition elements including the Asmara-based Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). Ould-Abdallah recently launched discussions in Nairobi with the ARS, whose leaders have agreed to engage in discussion with the TFG on a transitional process for Somalia (Ref B). Ould-Abdallah intends to launch direct discussions between the TFG and ARS in Djibouti in mid-May. However, he first needs both the ARS and the TFG to appoint 5-7 delegates with the authority to discuss the full range of political and reconciliation issues. If he has not done so by the time he arrives in Washington, we must urge Yusuf to nominate TFG representatives to engage in discussions with the ARS.

¶10. (S/NF) TFG forces and associated militia have been unable to reverse the deteriorating security situation in south-central Somalia in spite of the more than 15 month occupation of Mogadishu by the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF). The ENDF has indicated its plans to scale down operations in Somalia (Ref C). All stakeholders

agree on the need to achieve a ceasefire and for neutral forces to assist in maintaining peace and security in Somalia. Many Nairobi-based Somalia watchers believe that the key to achieving peace and security in Mogadishu lays through empowering local communities at the district level with the authorities and responsibility for security. The PM's Bakara market initiative (Ref D) was a step in the right direction, and a possible model for the city's other districts. Yusuf should be encouraged to support the PM's bottom up approach to achieving security through Mogadishu's communities (and a ceasefire through dialogue with the opposition), and to avoid heavy-handed tactics that play into the hands of the extremists.

Suggested Talking Points

¶11. (SBU) In meetings with President Yusuf and members of his delegation, we recommend emphasizing the following points:

- Congratulate Yusuf on his appointment of an effective Prime Minister and cabinet who have gained the trust of key stakeholders.
- Voice strong support for Prime Minister Hussein and his leadership in reaching out to internal opposition elements.
- Insist that Yusuf and the Prime Minister maintain a unified public front to engage Somalis in peace-building and preparing for a democratic transition.
- Emphasize the need for the TFG to focus on concrete steps necessary to secure the transition (constitution drafting, political party and electoral law, census, etc.)
- Encourage support for efforts led by SRSG Ould-Abdallah to reach out to ARS moderates as an external opposition, and to Hawiye traditional leaders and elders who represent the internal opposition.
- Highlight support for AMISOM and UN approval of a peacekeeping force in Somalia.
- Encourage Yusuf to focus on building a positive legacy by making the way for peace through dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia.
- Emphasize the importance of cooperation to facilitate the provision of human assistance.

RANNEBERGER